

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



WORLD REACTION TO
THE ASSASSINATION OF
PRESIDENT KENNEDY

24 Nov 1963
(Information as of 0700 EST)

State Department
review completed

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(Information as of 0700 EST)

SUMMARY

Expressions of shock, regret and sympathy over the assassination of President Kennedy continue to dominate world reaction, but there are a growing number of comments looking to the future. There are expressions of hope or confidence that the new administration will maintain Kennedy's policies and programs without change or weakening. There is also concern over the reactions that may be set off by the Communist affiliations of the accused assassin.

Havana and Moscow both reveal concern on the latter score. Castro centered a two-hour speech last night on his fear that a new administration may take a more aggressive line toward Cuba, and complained that Oswald is being used for "a campaign of defamation against the Soviet Union and Cuba."

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SINO-SOVIET ORBIT

There is no indication thus far that Soviet leaders have any intention of trying to take advantage of the assassination of President Kennedy to advance their aims by some kind of assertive pressure on the US. Soviet interest in maintaining the atmosphere of detente created by the nuclear test ban treaty is demonstrated by the appointment of Mikoyan to head the Soviet delegation to President Kennedy's funeral. Mikoyan is personally acquainted with many high-level US officials and participated in the settlement of the Cuban missile crisis last fall. Moscow has consistently presented the settlement of that crisis as the epitome of peaceful coexistence in action.

Moscow appears genuinely surprised and irritated that President Kennedy's accused assassin is a left-winger. Moscow would have undoubtedly preferred that the killer had connections with the extreme right wing, and Soviet propaganda would have capitalized on such a development. Immediately following the death of President Kennedy, Moscow was preparing the way for a massive propaganda campaign against US right-wing elements, and seems to have been caught short by the announcement of the arrest of Oswald with his left-wing connections. Pravda today charges that American right-wingers are trying to use the assassination of President Kennedy to stir up anti-Soviet and anti-Cuban hysteria. Pravda notes that Oswald is a former Marine, that he has been in the Soviet Union, and "was allegedly associated with the local organization of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee."

Moscow has not yet carried any assessment of President Johnson or speculated on his future policies. Soviet comment, however, conveys the impression that Soviet leaders hope that the trend toward improving US-Soviet relations will continue.

Peiping continues to withhold comment on the assassination and Mr. Johnson's assumption of the presidency. Kennedy was one of Peiping's favorite propaganda targets as an alleged "warmonger," and the Chinese Communists devoted considerable effort towards denouncing Khrushchev for his "naive" association with the late President.

At Conakry, Guinea, a Chinese Communist delegation to a conference of Afro-Asian lawyers walked out of the hall yesterday when the chairman asked members to stand for one minute in silent tribute to the slain president. The Chinese returned to the meeting only after the tribute.

WESTERN EUROPE

Expressions of grief and sympathy continued to dominate European reaction. There are reports from almost all countries that national days or weeks of mourning have been scheduled. Governmental statements have concentrated on eulogies of President Kennedy, but there has been some press comment on President Johnson, generally taking the line that there is no reason for anxiety or fear.

In Italy the psychological impact of President Kennedy's death very probably provided the impulse to help leaders of the four-party "center-left" coalition to compose their remaining differences and reach agreement on the formation of a government. While a number of procedural steps must still be taken and a parliamentary vote of confidence probably will not come before mid-December, yesterday's meeting in Rome achieved definitive agreement.

French President De Gaulle's statement of sympathy and his decision to attend the funeral in Washington are being interpreted by the French press as evidence of De Gaulle's intention to seek improved relations with the US. It appears likely that De Gaulle, who has maintained a dispassionate attitude toward several nearly successful attempts on his own life, was profoundly shocked by the assassination.

In Sweden, police announced early today that two anonymous telephone calls threatening the life of Premier Tage Erlander had been received since the assassination. The premier has been put under strong police protection.

West Berliners lighted thousands of candles in honor of President Kennedy last night as they held a second evening of emotional, but orderly demonstrations. Mayor Willy Brandt recalled the encouragement given to West Berliners by President Johnson's visit to the city six days after the Berlin Wall went up.

Both the Swiss and British press, noting parallels between the present and the death of President Roosevelt, comment that there is no reason why President Johnson should not be as successful as President Truman in administering "his rich heritage sensibly and well."

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LATIN AMERICA

The first official comments from Latin America on possible political implications of President Kennedy's assassination have appeared in Cuba, Brazil, and Bolivia. Fidel Castro devoted a two-hour special speech yesterday to the President's death and the dangers to Cuba inherent in the changeover of executive power in the United States.

In what he termed an objective analysis of events, Fidel Castro declared that Cuba may face "an even worse policy" from the US as a result of President Kennedy's death, and that Cuba may be confronted with a new US-backed invasion under President Johnson. Speaking to all of Latin America in a special radio and television speech yesterday, Castro called the assassination "grave and bad news" for the Cuban people, and said that it presents "every prospect of a drift from a bad to a worse situation."

Castro devoted a considerable portion of his talk to the theme that "reactionary factions" in the US--those who favor an invasion of Cuba--benefit most from the assassination. He implied that without the "strong authority of President Kennedy the danger of a resurgence of "reactionary trends" has increased.

The Communist newspaper El Popular of Montevideo blames the assassination on "rabid and racist circles" who want the US to adopt a more "aggressive orientation" in foreign policy.

Cuba's Ambassador to the UN, Carlos Lechuga, issued a statement in which he said that the people and the government of Cuba "received with deep displeasure the news of President Kennedy's tragic death."

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Amid rumors of possible plans to mob the Cuban Embassy in La Paz, Bolivia, the Bolivian Foreign Minister several times expressed concern over the consequences of the political affiliation of the assassin. The US Charge reports that the Foreign Minister was extremely agitated by reports the assassin may be Communist-trained and allied with the Castro movement. The Charge comments that the Foreign Minister may be worried about the effect on his own position and on his policy of continued contacts with Cuba.

In Brazil the leading newspaper Jornal do Brasil comments that unidentified aides of President Goulart fear "a profound change in political understanding" which the US Government under Kennedy maintained with the West. Some Brazilian newspapers, however, express the editorial judgement that President Johnson perhaps is capable of "keeping a balance between the two poles of US opinion on world problems and the development of Latin American nations."

The Meeting of Ministers of Interior of Central America, Panama, and the US, originally scheduled to be held in El Salvador on 25 November, has been postponed.

ASIA AND AFRICA

The countries of Asia and Africa are concentrating on eulogies pointing to the late President Kennedy's efforts to improve relations between the United States and the USSR and to achieve a nuclear test ban.

In one of the relatively few reactions looking to the future, the Syrian Foreign Minister has set the tone by stating in a cable to the US Secretary of State that "I...hope that in future the same spirit of interest and concern will be shown toward the question of peace which was demonstrated by the late, great President." The King of Jordan also hopes that President Johnson will "follow in the steps" of the late President. President Nasser of Egypt wishes the new American President "success in carrying the banner...to new and broad horizons to realize progress and peace." Israel, supporting President Johnson, recalls his frequent displays of friendship toward that country.

Indian Prime Minister Nehru, stating that "all of us had great hopes that his (President Kennedy's) policy would lead to a lowering of tension in the world and thus bring an end to the cold war," says "I earnestly trust that the liberal policies he pursued will be continued and will find fruits."

In Southeast Asia, Indonesian President Sukarno eulogizes President Kennedy's understanding of Indonesia and its motives, but takes the occasion simultaneously to criticize the Malaysian Government for failing to do so.

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Only the Pathet Lao clandestine radio in Laos continues to accuse the United States of a "two-faced" policy resulting in occupation of foreign countries and "sanguinary repression of the American workers and Negroes." It says the recent deaths of Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu in Saigon, together with that of President Kennedy, "are signs of the total collapse of imperialism. The Laotian people are overjoyed at hearing...of the death of another of their sworn enemies."

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UNCODED In the Far East, Japanese political and economic leaders are reacting cautiously, seeing no major alteration in American policies

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The nations of Africa continue to emphasize President Kennedy's efforts on behalf of the American Negro and the equality of all peoples. Algerian radio commentary says "the peaceful character of President Kennedy's policy...will not disappear with its author from the leadership of US policy." The assassination of the former President "will make the supporters of peace in the world and the supporters of equality among mankind stand as one man against any attempt to disrupt the battle against racial discrimination and against the sparking off of a devastating nuclear war." President Tubman states Liberia will remain "closely aligned with the United States by ties of friendship."

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